

Water Framework Directive: What is going on in Brussels regarding river policies?

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2027 is the extended deadline for Member States to meet the objective of the Water Framework Directive: good ecological status for all Europe's waters. No other piece of environmental legislation is better equipped to accomplish sustainable and integrated river management. The Water Framework Directive has spurred water quality improvements over the past decade. According to Wetlands International, these initial achievements should inspire Member States to step up their ambition to achieve the WFD objectives in the second and third cycle of River Basin Management Plans. By implementing large-scale measures for river restoration Member States should tackle the enduring pressures on rivers and wetlands.

According to the European Environment Agency report '[European waters — assessment of status and pressures 2018](#)', Member States have enhanced their monitoring and assessment methods of the parameters for water quality which allows for better interpretation of the state of European water bodies. Similarly, Member States increased their knowledge of pressures from different human activities threatening the good functioning of water-related ecosystems including wetlands.

Based on the reported data, the EEA has found that around 40% of monitored rivers, lakes, transitional waters and coastal waters is currently in good ecological status, while only 38 % is in good chemical status. The most commonly reported pressure related to ecological status concerns hydromorphological pressures affecting over 40% of surface water bodies. (including dams constructed for hydropower)

Water Framework Directive 'fit for purpose'?

Every piece of EU legislation undergoes a fitness check after it has been in force for a number of years. The aim is to evaluate whether it is still "fit for purpose" by looking into whether it is still relevant for meeting the objectives, adds value at European level, and is generally effective and consistent with other policies.

The fitness check of the WFD officially started in 2018 and is expected to conclude in 2019 with a "Fitness Check Report" of the European Commission. After the report is published, the Council of the EU (which is composed of EU Member States) and the European Parliament will have an opportunity to react on the Commission's conclusions.

The WFD is undergoing its standard review (known as a 'fitness check'), and EU Member States have used this opportunity to initiate a strong attack on the WFD. Their aim is to weaken some of the law's particularly progressive and strong elements. Therefore, 100 Environmental groups have launched a European campaign calling on the European Commission to defend the EU law that

protects all sources of Europe's water, such as rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands and groundwater, during its ongoing evaluation (the "fitness check").

More information:

Wetlands International's press release on the EEA report:

<https://europe.wetlands.org/news/new-report-highlights-urgent-need-restore-rivers-europe/>

Wetlands International and the #ProtectWater campaign:

<https://europe.wetlands.org/support-us/protectwater/>

Wetlands International's press release on the #ProtectWater campaign:

<https://europe.wetlands.org/news/press-release-beer-future/>

About the EU water law and public consultation:

<https://www.livingrivers.eu/about/about-eu-water-law-public-consultation>